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C.I.A. Disputes White House On Soviet Antimissile Gains

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

In a sharp contradiction to Congressional testimony by the Reagan Administration, a Central Intelligence Agency report released yesterday says the Soviet Union would have to conduct further underground nuclear tests before it could deploy an X-ray laser, an advanced antimissile weapon.

The C.I.A. assessment is based on secret intelligence information and was made public by Representative Edward J. Markey, Democrat of Massachusetts. It implies that the Soviet Union's X-ray laser research is not so advanced as the Administration had portrayed it earlier this year.

The Department of Energy, responding to questions raised by a Congressional panel studying a comprehensive test ban treaty with the Soviet Union, reported recently that it did "suspect" that the Russians were "substantially ahead" of the United States in such research and might be able to deploy X-ray lasers powered by nuclear explosions "with no additional testing." The department is responsible for the design and manufacture of the nation's nuclear weapons.

The status of the Soviet research is central to debates on the United States' continued research on X-ray lasers and other advanced nuclear weapons.

Administration officials say the American research is intended only to assess Soviet capabilities, and that the X-ray device is not meant for use in President Reagan's proposed advanced missile defense, which they stress is "nonnuclear." Critics say the Administration wants the nuclear device for its antimissile system and that the Russians, who have stopped nuclear testing, are at a standstill in such research.

The Soviet leader, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, announced a unilateral Soviet moratorium on nuclear testing last August. He recently said the moratorium will be extended until August in the hope that the United States would join in a permanent ban. The Administration has rejected all such Soviet offers and said repeatedly that the United States will continue its testing.

The X-ray device, which has been under development in the United States for six years, focuses the power of an exploding hydrogen bomb into beams of radiation that in theory can destroy enemy missiles in space. It is the premier device in the proposed arsenal of devices that the Administration calls "nuclear-driven directed energy weapons." American scientists have estimated that to perfect such devices might require dozens, or even hundreds, of underground nuclear tests.

'Threat Inflation' Seen

"What we have here is a classic case of threat inflation," Mr. Markey said in a statement. "The Department of Energy has exaggerated Soviet X-ray laser capabilities to justify its budget request for the U.S. X-ray laser program." This year the Administration wants to spend more than \$500 million on such research, nearly double last year's budget.

Mr. Markey, who is chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy Conservation and Power of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, asked the C.I.A. for its opinion on Soviet X-ray laser work after the Energy Department made written statements to his staff after a hearing in February.

A test ban treaty, the Energy Department wrote, "could be very ineffective in blocking development of Soviet nuclear-directed energy weapons (NDEW), particularly if the Soviets are well ahead of the U.S. in NDEW technologies."

"We suspect this to be the case, but we cannot know for sure," it continued. "If the Soviets are substantially ahead, they might be able to achieve the capability to deploy nuclear-directed energy weapons with no additional testing."

The one-page C.I.A. response to Mr. Markey, dated May 23, was written by David D. Grimes, the agency's director of Congressional affairs, on behalf of William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence.

"The C.I.A. does not believe that the Soviet Union can deploy nuclear-driven directed energy weapons without con-

ducting additional explosive tests." It said, adding that "relevant classified data is available should you desire a briefing."

Since the Soviet Union declared its unilateral moratorium Aug. 6, the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the United States has announced 11 underground nuclear tests, according to Chris L. West, a spokesman at the Nevada Test Site, operated by the Energy Department.

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